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SUBJECT: THE CHADIAN GO-BETWEEN? EX-REBEL SOUBIANE "TELLS
ALL" AND MAKES A LOT OF SENSE

REF: A. N'DJAMENA 499

[1](#)B. N'DJAMENA 457

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Ambassador and DCM met November 2 with Ahmat Soubiane, who described his reasons for going into rebellion, his reasons for returning to Chad, his intention to continue to work to reconcile his former rebel comrades with the GOC, his intention to devote himself initially to socio-economic projects designed to attract Chadian emigres back to Chad from other countries in the region rather than to engage politically in a big way, and his views on how to end the Chad-Sudan proxy war. He gave us a copy of the agreement that governed his group's return (scanned copy sent to AF/C). Soubiane's key points were:

-- He broke with the GOC in 2003 over President Deby's successful amendment of the constitution to permit unlimited presidential terms;

-- He decided to return to Chad because he soon became convinced that a violent overthrow of the Deby Government by the politically insincere or politically illiterate Chad rebel chiefs would be worse than working from within Chad to facilitate reform;

-- He appreciated his conversations with DAS Wycoff over the past 20 months, which helped him arrive at his decision to return;

-- He praised President Deby, FORMIN Faki and National Mediator Abderamane Moussa for the honesty and transparency of their dealing with him and his men;

-- The Libyans had played a key facilitating role in his return to Chad, along with some 1700 ex-rebels, mostly his own fighters but also defectors from other rebel formations;

-- The French had also been useful in facilitating his group's return;

-- Some but not all of his fighters might enter the Chad military, and his senior counselors would be offered civil

service positions if they were qualified;

-- Remaining Chad rebels were still well armed and well equipped (some 450 armed vehicles) but were suffering from very low morale -- individual rebel fighters from all groups continued to present themselves at the border to re-enter Chad, and rebel chiefs in Sudan had difficulty keeping their fighters loyal;

-- The Sudanese had the means -- money, intelligence, planning -- to "re-animate" the rebels, if they chose to increase their investment in the rebellion;

-- The current bilateral Chad-Sudan effort aimed at detente had a good chance of success, because such detente was in Chad's interest and because Ghazi's involvement on the Sudanese side guaranteed a degree of seriousness and honesty in diplomatic approaches to Chad -- which was not the case with the previous chief Sudanese interlocutors with Chad;

-- Soubiane had supported and tried to advance the current bilateral negotiating track and would continue to do so; his contacts within rebel groups and experience with the Sudanese gave him the ability to play a useful role if the Deby government chose to deploy him;

-- He had told the Sudanese that their support of Chad rebels was a "diminishing resource" and that they should play the rebel card by ending support for them sooner, rather than later, because their hand was losing its value as rebels defected;

NDJAMENA 00000503 002 OF 004

-- The next bilateral move was up to Sudan: Claiming that the rebels had been "cantoned" at Ain Sirro and the rebel chiefs called to Khartoum was not good enough: the rebel chiefs themselves had moved their fighters to Ain Sirro before Ghazi's visit to keep them from joining Soubiane's defecting group;

-- Ending any "proxy war" would be tricky: neither side wanted to be the first to lay down its "weapons";

-- President Deby's decision to move Oure Cassoni camp deeper into Chad and away from the border was a clear signal to Khartoum and to the JEM that Deby considered the JEM "expendable," if his conditions were met;

-- Chad rebels had no/no international legitimacy, while JEM was the object of negotiations by the international community, invited to Doha, etc. -- so JEM had peaceful and negotiated courses of action open to it that the Chad rebels did not have;

-- This could give Deby "cover" for an eventual ending of support for JEM in Chad as the JEM turned itself into more of a political movement than armed group in contact and negotiations with the international community;

-- Soubiane himself intended to devote himself initially to socio-economic projects designed to attract Chadian emigres back to Chad from other neighboring countries rather than to engage in Chadian politics in a big way, at least at first.

12. (SBU) Soubiane was relaxed, poised and quite willing to explore his political past and future as well as his perspective on the Chad-Sudan "proxy war" and the possibilities of Chad-Sudan detente. He is obviously well-informed and capable of nuanced analysis of his political friends and enemies.

13. (SBU) If we had to bet, we would wager that his defection from the Chadian rebellion was based strictly on a cost-benefit analysis: that is, on his judgment that the Chad rebellion is in decline and going to lose eventually,

and that he should throw in his hand with the eventual winning side before it is too late, as DAS Wycoff had been telling him for some time. END SUMMARY.

U.S. INSPIRES

14. (SBU) Soubiane described his democratic ambitions for Chad as having been formed to a certain extent during his tenure as Ambassador to the U.S. He stressed that his seven-year "quest" as a rebel leader and his ultimate decision to return home this summer were inspired by hopes for African democratization and improvements in rule of law and human rights. He said that he had been motivated by the Chadian constitution, which had been abrogated by President Deby, but which he hoped to be able to teach "Chadian people at all levels" to respect and understand. He said that he had never been a proponent of armed conflict, pointing out that units loyal to him had not taken part in fighting in N'Djamena in 2008 or in Am Dam in 2009. He offered that leaving Chad had been relatively easy, but that coming back had required time and reflection -- "and if there had been more receptivity from my old friends here, I would have come back sooner." Soubiane pointed out that his daughters, who remained in school outside Washington DC, were anxious about his welfare and safety, which he was now trusting to the GoC. He said that the daughters were not shy about insisting that he adhere to their American-born ideals as he pursued reconciliation with the GoC. He added that his conversations over the past several months with AF DAS Karl Wycoff had been very valuable in shaping his thinking, and that the French and Libyans had also been helpful in facilitating his return.

HOME IS THE SAILOR

NDJAMENA 00000503 003 OF 004

15. (SBU) Soubiane described his initial contacts upon return with President Deby, "a schoolmate from childhood," as cordial. The two had spoken of Soubiane's desire to help with restabilization of Chad, including reintegration of military units formerly loyal to Soubiane into the Chadian National Army (ANT). Soubiane said that he and President Deby had also discussed jobs for his supporters in the Chadian bureaucracy and assistance packages for Chadian refugees who had fled to Sudan, CAR and Libya when he had broken with the Deby regime. "Some of my vision for Chad is economic," said Soubiane; "I want to create projects that will help Chadians who supported me." This might not happen for a year or so, Soubiane conceded, but "I'll see what I can accomplish little by little to rebuild confidence over time."

16. (SBU) Ambassador made clear that the U.S. was pleased at Soubiane's decision to return to Chad, and supportive of the intra-Chadian reconciliation process that had been going on for some time (Refs A-B). In 2008, at the time of rebel attacks on the capital, we had recommended GoC outreach to figures such as Soubiane. Former CEMGA al-Jineidi had returned, and now political dissidents including Nahor Ngawara Mahamout were coming back from exile as well.

ROLE IN ELECTORAL PROCESS?

17. (SBU) Ambassador advised Soubiane that the U.S. hoped he would play a positive role in Chad's upcoming electoral process. Soubiane said that he intended to do so, adding that he had always been a strong proponent of peaceful transfer of power. One of the factors that had complicated his return, he continued, was the fragmented nature of the Chadian opposition. "I don't agree with the government here or the government in Khartoum," said Soubiane. "Here a state

exists and there are systems and institutions and secure borders, but there is also injustice and no social planning."

Soubiane cautioned that political change in Chad would not necessarily be change for the better -- "we could easily go the way of Somalia, and I am saying this to both the government and opposition."

18. (SBU) "I want to be discreet in my role here," continued Soubiane. "I want to rebuild relations with the government first, I have not yet said this to President Deby, but I don't have political ambitions for the moment. I won't have time to mount an electoral campaign."

CHADIAN REBELS

19. (SBU) Soubiane indicated that so long as the Deby regime continued to send the signal that former opponents were welcome to return voluntarily, "others will come back." "But even dictators can say they are in favor of transparency," he observed. Rebel leader Timan Erdimi, for his part, was poorly placed to take part in any sort of democratization or reconciliation processes in Chad because he had no political credibility. The Chadian rebellion was definitely losing its steam. Little by little, Chadian rebels were discovering that the rebellion lacked ideals. As they came to see that the rebellion had no positive goals, they concluded that there was little point in continuing the fight. Chadian rebels still in Sudan "don't like Deby, but beyond that they don't know what they want: they don't know what a state is or what a democratic process is."

110. (SBU) Still, the Chadian rebels had a certain degree of military strength, as well as equipment furnished by Sudan, Soubiane cautioned. Their vehicle strength was around 450 SUVs. They also had the support of Sudan's "powerful, wealthy intelligence assets," who could raise or lower Chadian rebel morale at will. Khartoum itself "didn't really care about Chad," said Soubiane. President Bashir was

NDJAMENA 00000503 004 OF 004

worried about his own political opponents.

CHAD-SUDAN CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES

111. (SBU) Asked about the "congress of rebels" in Sudan that National Mediator Abderahmane had indicated the GoS might be organizing, Soubiane advised that the GoS was trying to "keep the Chadian rebels busy" in innocuous ways while waiting to see what the GoC would do with the JEM. "I think that President Bashir wants to give up on them, but he has no confidence in the Chadian government." Asked whether Sudanese claims that the Chadian rebels were now cantoned at Ain Sirro should count for the GoC as fulfillment of Sudan's initial confidence-building measure, Soubiane pointed out that the Chadian rebels had been at Ain Sirro all summer long, "on the far side of a ouaddi that will soon dry up, allowing them to go wherever they want." What was more, "I told them to go there," asserted Soubiane. The Chadian rebels were in Ain Sirro voluntarily, awaiting the end of the rainy season. The Chadians were sure to see a Sudanese attempt to declare the status quo as fulfillment of a pledge to be disingenuous and unacceptable.

112. (SBU) When the two sides had actually taken steps to reassure each other, "we will help both sides with verification," said Soubiane. Asked what the GoC could do to divest itself of the JEM, Soubiane said that this was a question he had posed of President Deby, and also of the Libyans. When speaking with the JEM directly, Soubiane noted that he advised "finding political solutions," including through negotiation at Doha and efforts to transform the JEM into a political force. Soubiane offered that the

international community would have to help the JEM find a suitable role, on grounds that the IC had negotiated with Khalil Ibrahim and in doing so helped to "internationalize" him. Soubiane described meetings he had recently had in Libya with Djibril Ibrahim, whom he had told to travel to Doha for negotiations. "The JEM's political capital is like a debit card running down," said Soubiane. Opportunities were disappearing, so the JEM should use what remained of the international community's tolerance for it to good purpose.

¶13. (SBU) Soubiane told us that he had offered advice to both the GoC and GoS at the time of the visit of Presidential Envoy Ghazi to Chad in mid-October, to the effect that both sides should find peaceful means to resolve their differences. Ghazi was "more or less interested in reconciliation," said Soubiane, but the Sudanese side remained suspicious of Chadian motives. Sudan appreciated S/E Gration, whom they felt understood their point of view. The Chadian offer to move the Oure Cassoni refugee camp away from the border, and away for easy access by the JEM, would surely be seen as a confidence-building measure by Khartoum.

COMMENT

¶14. (SBU) Soubiane was relaxed, poised and quite willing to explore his political past and future as well as his perspective on the Chad-Sudan "proxy war" and the possibilities of Chad-Sudan detente. He is obviously well-informed and capable of nuanced analysis of his political friends and enemies. If we had to bet, we would wager that his defection from the Chadian rebellion was based strictly on a cost-benefit analysis: that is, on his judgment that the Chad rebellion is in decline and going to lose eventually, and that he should throw in his hand with the eventual winning side before it is too late, as DAS Wycoff had been telling him for some time.
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